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Medics Lead a Dog's Life

Story & Photos by Sgt. Jerry Wilson
2SCR Public Affairs.

ZABUL, Afghanistan- Medics from the 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment received some paws on training Thursday, Aug. 8 at Forward Operating Base Lagman from some very unusual instruction. The Troopers received a class on how to administer basic first aid to the working dogs that help provide security for Soldiers around the FOB.

Working dogs are used around the FOBs to detect explosives and other contraband that someone may try to sneak onto the post. Dogs are used to search vehicles and parcels coming onto the FOB since they are able to find things that could be overlooked by the human eye. This service is run by a civilian security firm that employs several highly trained professionals who have many years of experience working in a variety of canine units. Canine units are a critical part of stemming the traffic of explosives and illegal drugs, not only on posts, but in and around the province. These four-legged heroes provide a vital service in the ongoing mission to bring security to the people of Afghanistan.

“We are giving the medics a briefing on the fundamentals of canine first aid,” explained one veteran dog handler. “This will give them a pretty good idea of how to care for our dogs if we get injured or the dog does.”

In addition to learning how to recognize and treat injured dogs, the medics were taught the safest way to secure the dog if they have to render aid to its handler.

“This is mostly familiarization for the medical staff and the dogs,” said the instructor of the class. “What to do to separate the dog and the handler in case one of them go down.”

“We want them to be comfortable because if they aren’t,” continued the instructor, “that is a big trigger to the dogs.”

For most of the students, this was as much fun as it was informative. Many found it to be a great escape from the highly stressful working environment.

“It’s been really cool to work with the dogs,” said Pfc. Ellen Fischer. “Practicing putting the muzzle and leash on is going to be really helpful if we ever have to treat one of their handlers so we don’t get attacked by the dogs. “

After each student had the chance to practice these dog handling techniques, a few brave souls volunteered to don the infamous “Bite Suit”, a training tool used to teach the dogs to attack a fleeing suspect. The suit is layered with heavy padding to allow the instructor to be bitten without any harm to their physical well being.

For Spc. Sidney Norman it was a great chance to feel like he was home again.

“I have a big dog back home that likes to jump on you,” he said. “Of course I have never had him actually latch on with his teeth.”

Norman said wearing the suit was more exciting than scary.

“You would think it would be a little scary,” Norman explained, “but once the dog latches on and you shift back and forth and see the dog swinging with you it’s really fun and exhilarating.”



Good Boy: Pfc. Ellen Fischer learns how to operate a muzzle under the watchful eye of her coach Boscoe.

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Down Girl: Spc. Sidney Norman gets a first-hand lesson in how to take down a fleeing suspect from a canine nicknamed the spider Monkey Ninja.

